The EASTR Papers nº 2

AERTE
EASTR

Resilience in the Age of Vulnerabilities of Populations

XXXIst European Days of the State Territorial Representatives

Tirana, May 14-16th, 2026

The EASTR Papers

AERTE
EASTR

Resilience in the Age of Vulnerabilities of Populations

XXXIst European Days of the State Territorial Representatives

Design and production : Agence Pastelle.
Illustrations generated via ChatGPT.

Table of Contents

5

Editorial

by Ignazio PORTELLI
President of EASTR

6

Overview

Resilience, a new grammar for public action

8

Spain

Resilience in the era of population vulnerabilities: Spain's approach to emerging challenges

12

Finland

Finland's model of civil preparedness: a society built to withstand crises

15

Albania

Bringing civil society into the heart of local accountability

18

France

Foundations in Europe, the quiet sentinels of social cohesion

21

Norway

Norway's total defence model: resilience as a national habit

24

Türkiye

Governors mobilized to address social vulnerabilities

27

Switzerland

Artificial Intelligence in the service of the state: a powerful tool, provided we know how to use it

30

Belgium

National resilience: Belgium prepares for crisis before it strikes

Artificial intelligence in crisis management: the Brussels region tests the future of resilience

Social media: ten years on, crisis has changed shape

39

Italy

The Evolution of Territorial Governance

42

Netherlands

The Brabant Standard: how a region turns resilience into public policy

Ignazio **PORTELLI**

→ President of EASTR, Prefect of ENNA (Italy)

Making resilience a shared responsibility

With this second edition of *the EASTR Papers*, our association continues to pursue the goal that inspired the creation of this series: to compare national experiences in order to foster a dialogue rooted directly in on-the-ground realities.

This volume follows the 31st European Days of EASTR, held in Tirana in May 2026. Its title, *"Resilience in the Age of Vulnerabilities of Populations,"* captures the central question of our discussions : how can we enable our societies to endure, adapt, and recover as crises become more frequent, more complex, and more intertwined? It also underscores that these crises do not affect all regions or all people in the same way.

Throughout these pages, resilience is revealed in all its breadth. It encompasses civil preparedness and the continuity of essential services, the protection of vulnerable populations, citizen participation, comprehensive defense, the fight against disinformation, artificial intelligence, and the preservation of the rule of law.

The European experiences gathered here demonstrate the diversity of responses, but also the strength of the principles that unite us.

A key lesson emerges: a well-informed, prepared, and engaged population becomes an essential resource for collective resilience. Collective resilience, therefore, does not rely solely on plans, infrastructure, or technology; it is also built on trust between citizens and institutions, risk education, civil society engagement, and a shared culture of responsibility.

In this process, the State's local representative plays a decisive role. They organize cooperation, ensure continuity, facilitate mediation, and adapt responses to local realities. In the face of transnational and often hybrid threats, their local presence makes it possible to link strategy to action and the protection of institutions to that of individuals.

May this second issue of the Papers contribute to everyone's reflections and practices, so that resilience may fully become a shared responsibility.

Resilience, a new grammar for public action

Eric FREYSSELINARD

→ Prefect of Vendée, Deputy Vice-President of the ACPHFMI (France)

Held in Tirana in May 2026, the European EASTR Days focused on a question that has become central for European states: **how can societies be made capable of withstanding crises that are more frequent, more complex and increasingly interconnected?** Natural disasters, terrorism, organised crime, health crises, the war in Ukraine, cyberattacks, information manipulation, artificial intelligence and climate change **now cut across territories, institutions and populations**. In this context, the territorial representative of the State emerges as a **key actor**, positioned between government, local authorities, public services, civil society and citizens.

The opening session set the political framework for the discussions. The Albanian authorities emphasised the country's European trajectory, with the ambition of joining the European Union by 2030, as well as the reforms undertaken in decentralisation, public security and alignment with European standards. From the outset, EASTR put forward a strong idea: **resilience is not only about resisting shocks; it also means turning them into collective learning.**

The first round table, dedicated to **the organisation of resilience**, highlighted the need to move from a reactive approach to a culture of preparedness. Spain recalled that **prevention should be placed on the same level as crisis management**. Cathy Berx, Governor of Antwerp, stressed **the role of the population**: a vulnerable society can be rapidly destabilised, but an informed and prepared population becomes a major resource. In Belgium, the identification of risk scenarios feeds into a family of plans involving both the whole State and the whole of society. Governors contribute to ensuring the continuity of local services, organising alerts, evacuations, accommodation and volunteer involvement. This approach rests on one conviction: **trust between citizens and institutions is a security infrastructure as essential as material resources.**

Several contributions confirmed this direction. Italy called for a **social organisation of resilience** involving public, economic and social actors.

> *Trust between citizens and institutions is a security infrastructure as essential as material resources*

France presented its National Resilience Strategy, with two priorities: **risk education at every age and the creation of a pool of skills that can be mobilised** in the event of a major crisis. Finland offered one of the most structured models, combining civil protection shelters, a 72-hour self-sufficiency doctrine and highly organised territorial preparedness. Shaped by its history and proximity to Russia, Finland has made **trust in the authorities and the mobilisation of society as a whole a pillar of its total defence model**.

The second round table shifted the focus to civil society. Dominique Dalmas recalled that resilience is **a collective capacity to anticipate, absorb, recover and learn**. Norway presented its own total defence model, based on **continuous cooperation between civilian and military actors**. The year 2026 has been declared the "year of total defence", with exercises aimed at the population. Foundations were also analysed as actors of social cohesion: they operate over the long term, support fragile territories and sometimes have a level of agility that public structures lack.

The Albanian case made it possible to address **the concrete limits of citizen participation**. The 2015 territorial reform reduced the number of municipalities from 373 to 61, strengthening administrative capacity while also distancing some citizens from decision-making centres. Several speakers argued for clearer and more effective participation: simplified access to information, less technical administrative language, earlier consultations, support for independent organisations and better integration of the diaspora. **The democratic stakes are decisive**: when people no longer believe their voice matters, they withdraw from public debate, weakening collective cohesion.

Türkiye presented **the action of governors in support of vulnerable populations amid deep demographic change**: ageing, migration, declining fertility and changing family structures. As representatives of the State in the provinces, governors coordinate social, health and civil protection mechanisms. Several projects illustrated this work: preventing school dropout, supporting people with disabilities, promoting women's employment, improving health prevention and preparing for disasters. Resilience thus appears as a local policy, **capable of connecting social vulnerabilities with territorial organisation**.

The third round table focused on **technological disruption**. The French prefect, Ziad Khoury, recalled that sovereignty is now also digital, technological and immaterial. Europe cannot simply adopt a defensive stance towards innovation: **without investment, it risks strategic dependence**. The Swiss prefect, Boris Cuanoud, explained how **generative artificial intelligence works, as well as its limits and risks**, particularly hallucinations and the blurring of truth and falsehood. His message can be summed up in one formula: **AI proposes, humans decide**. For public administrations, the challenge is twofold: gaining efficiency while protecting sensitive data.

The possible uses of AI in crisis management were then detailed: scenario simulation, early detection, crowd management, emergency call processing, drone control and decision support. Brussels presented a project carried out with the European Space Agency to simulate the mass evacuation of a football stadium. The discussions also highlighted **the fragility of the digital space**, between polarised social networks, disinformation and private messaging platforms that make collective perceptions harder to understand.

> *Resilience is not only about resisting shocks; it also means turning them into collective learning*

The final round table placed **citizens back at the heart of collective resilience**. The Netherlands showed how **organised crime can weaken the rule of law**, intimidate elected officials and businesses, and undermine democratic trust. Italy recalled **the role of the prefect as guarantor of the general interest**, mediator between actors and crisis coordinator. Albania concluded with an essential idea: **a resilient society must remain democratic, transparent and attentive to its citizens**.

By the end of the Days, a consensus had emerged. **Resilience can no longer be entrusted solely to emergency services**. It requires the long-term mobilisation of society as a whole: the State, local authorities, security forces, the military, businesses, foundations, associations, citizens and digital actors. It requires plans, exercises, tools, data and technologies, but also trust, participation, education and a shared culture of risk. **Faced with hybrid and transnational crises, the response must be territorial and European, technical and human, institutional and citizen-based**. Resilience is becoming a way of governing anxious societies without giving up on democracy.

Resilience in the era of population vulnerabilities : Spain's approach to emerging challenges

Alfonso Carlos GARCIA ROMERO

→ Deputy Director-General in charge of European and International Relations, Ministry of Territorial Policy and Democratic Memory

Spain

Faced with multiple and interconnected risks, Spain is strengthening its resilience through a comprehensive strategy that combines national security, public policies and coordinated action across all levels of government and society.

From 14 to 16 May, the conference Resilience in the Age of Vulnerabilities of Populations, held in Tirana, Albania, offered an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of resilience in a changing global context. The diversity of speakers and national experiences highlighted that resilience is not only about responding to crises, but also about anticipating risks, strengthening preparedness and building the capacity to adapt over time. These discussions underscored the importance of organising resilience as a shared and structured objective across institutions and societies.

In Spain, resilience is a key concept embedded within the National Security framework. Although the idea of resistance and recovery already appeared in earlier strategies, the concept has progressively evolved into a more comprehensive and strategic notion. The 2015 National Security Law formally incorporates resilience into the system, while the National Security Strategy of 2021 places it at the centre of a more integrated approach, involving all public administrations and civil society.

> *(...) resilience must also encompass the health, economic, social and institutional dimensions*

This perspective goes beyond traditional security concerns. The Covid-19 crisis clearly demonstrated that resilience must also encompass the health, economic, social and institutional dimensions. In this context, Spain launched the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, aimed at strengthening preparedness, supporting recovery and improving the country's capacity to respond to future crises, including those linked to climate change.

A BROAD RANGE OF RISKS SHAPING RESILIENCE POLICIES

Spain's National Security Strategy identifies a wide spectrum of threats and challenges that require coordinated and anticipatory responses. Strategic and regional tensions, for example, highlight the importance of monitoring international developments in order to better anticipate risks and adapt public policies accordingly.

> *Critical infrastructure protection also plays a central role*

Security threats such as terrorism and violent radicalisation are addressed not only through intelligence and law enforcement, but also through preventive approaches based on social inclusion, intercultural dialogue and education. Strengthening awareness and fostering a culture of prevention are key elements in building long-term resilience.

Health risks, particularly epidemics and pandemics, have led Spain to reinforce its biosecurity capacities. This includes increasing diagnostic and testing capabilities, improving infrastructure and regularly conducting simulations to assess response mechanisms, particularly in relation to zoonotic diseases.

Critical infrastructure protection also plays a central role. Cooperation with operators allows the implementation of preventive measures, while ensuring the capacity to respond and recover in the event of disruption. Similarly, emergency and disaster management policies promote a culture of preparedness and responsibility, supported by tools such as the National Early Warning Network "ES-Alert" and the deployment of specialised capacities like the Military Emergency Unit (UME).

NEW DOMAINS OF VULNERABILITY IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT

In an increasingly interconnected world, Spain also faces evolving threats linked to digitalisation and global interdependence. Cybersecurity is a major area of focus, with legislation imposing obligations on digital service providers and ensuring minimum levels of protection through risk analysis and regular audits.

Foreign interference and espionage activities, often carried out through cyber tools, require strengthened counter-intelligence efforts and increased awareness among citizens and strategic sectors. In parallel, misinformation campaigns are addressed through coordinated procedures linked to European mechanisms, combined with efforts to promote media literacy and prevent their spread within society.

Other areas of vulnerability, such as maritime and aerospace domains, are also being reinforced. In the maritime domain, efforts focus on combating organised crime, particularly drug trafficking, through enhanced intelligence, surveillance systems and new technological tools.

> *Cybersecurity is a major area of focus*

In the aerospace domain, Spain aligns with the EU Space Strategy for Security and Defence and conducts regular exercises to respond to unlawful interference in civil aviation.

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL RESILIENCE

Economic and financial stability is another pillar of resilience. Public support measures, including grants and incentives, aim to help citizens and businesses withstand crises. At the same time, institutions cooperate at national and European level to combat fraud and protect economic integrity.

Energy security has become increasingly relevant in recent years. Spain is promoting renewable energy sources, reducing consumption and reconfiguring its energy system through the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (PNIEC).

These efforts aim to strengthen supply security and reduce dependence on fossil fuels, while accelerating the energy transition.

Climate change represents one of the most significant long-term challenges. The National Climate Change Adaptation Plan provides a structured framework to identify vulnerabilities, monitor impacts and design concrete adaptation measures across sectors and territories. This approach enhances the capacity to anticipate risks and implement coordinated responses, contributing to a more resilient economy and society.

> *Economic and financial stability is another pillar of resilience*

In this sense, Spain has the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (PNACC), which provides an operational and evidence-based perspective on resilience to climate change. Through its monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the PNACC identifies specific vulnerabilities across sectors and territories and promotes the design of concrete adaptation measures and coordinated actions to address the impacts of climate change. This approach strengthens not only the capacity to anticipate risks, but also to plan and implement structural responses in the medium and long term, complementing the broader analysis of the National Security Strategy and reinforcing overall social and territorial resilience.

BUILDING RESILIENCE THROUGH COOPERATION

Spain's experience shows that resilience is not limited to a single policy area, but rather requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort. From security and health to energy, economy and climate, the range of challenges demands the involvement of all levels of government and the active participation of society.

> ***Resilience is not limited to a single policy area, but rather requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort***

Recent crises have demonstrated both the scale of the challenges and the capacity to respond effectively. Strengthening resilience therefore means not only reacting to shocks, but also reinforcing preparedness, coordination and long-term strategic planning. In this process, cooperation between institutions and across territories remains essential to build a more resilient and adaptable society.

Finland's model of civil preparedness: a society built to withstand crisis

Marko PUKKINEN

→ Director General of the Finnish Monitoring Agency

Finland

Finland's approach to civil preparedness is often described as one of the most comprehensive in Europe. It is not based on a single institution or emergency plan, but on a whole-of-society model in which authorities, citizens, businesses and organisations all have a role to play. This system has been shaped by history, geography and a strong awareness of security risks.

The Finnish model is rooted in the principle of total defence. This means that the protection of society's vital functions is a shared responsibility. Public authorities coordinate and lead, but resilience also depends on companies, local communities, voluntary organisations and ordinary citizens. The objective is simple: Finland must be able to function during serious disruptions, emergencies, war or the threat of war.

History plays a central role in this mindset. The experience of the Winter War, the Continuation War and the Cold War helped create a culture in which preparedness is not seen as exceptional, but as part of everyday national life. More recently, hybrid threats, Russia's war against Ukraine, and Finland's accession to NATO have reinforced the need for constant vigilance and adaptation.

Finnish citizens are encouraged to prepare for crises at household level. The well-known "72-hour" recommendation asks people to keep enough water, food, medicine and basic supplies at home to manage independently for three days. A battery-operated radio is also recommended. This may sound modest, but it reflects a wider philosophy : in a crisis, national resilience begins with practical responsibility at individual level.

INSTITUTIONS AND INFRASTRUCTURE IN SUPPORT OF CIVIL DEFENSE

Civil defence is led nationally by the Ministry of the Interior, which coordinates planning, preparedness and cooperation between authorities. The ministry is responsible for strategic guidance and ensures that rescue services and other operational actors can act effectively at national, regional and local levels. International cooperation is also part of the system, particularly through the European Union, NATO and civil defence agreements.

One of the most striking features of Finnish preparedness is its shelter infrastructure. Finland has around 50,500 civil defence shelters, with space for approximately 4.8 million people. This covers almost the entire urban population. These shelters are designed to protect people from blast waves, building collapse, radiation and chemical or biological threats. They are often located in ordinary buildings such as apartment blocks, schools, shopping centres and offices. In normal times, some are used for other purposes, including sports facilities, but they can be converted back into shelters within 72 hours.

> *The protection of society's vital functions is a shared responsibility*

This infrastructure is supported by legal obligations. Under the Rescue Act, shelters are built in connection with many properties, and property owners are responsible for maintaining them. The state and rescue services provide guidance and supervision. The result is a rare combination of physical infrastructure, legal structure and public awareness.

Finland's current security environment remains tense. Although the 2026 public military intelligence review does not identify an immediate military threat to Finland, the country's long border with Russia and the strategic importance of the Baltic Sea make preparedness essential. Military threats, hybrid influence operations, cyberattacks and disinformation are all part of the modern risk landscape. Finland's NATO membership strengthens situational awareness and cooperation, but it also requires careful planning against hybrid pressure.

A NEW MODEL OF NATIONAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

At the beginning of 2026, Finland created a new national body: the Finnish Supervisory Agency. It brings together functions from 21 former regional and national authorities and operates under the guidance of several ministries. Its purpose is to ensure more consistent practices across the country while maintaining a strong regional presence. With 18 offices and around 2,000 employees, the agency works across many sectors, including health and social welfare, education and culture, environmental protection, rescue services, occupational safety and business supervision.

From the perspective of civil preparedness, the agency's Rescue Services and Preparedness Department plays a central role. It is responsible for organising regional cooperation on preparedness across five cooperation areas. This includes regional foresight work, risk assessments, preparedness planning, exercises, national defence courses and monitoring the state of readiness in each region.

The agency also appoints regional preparedness committees. These bring together authorities, organisations and local actors to build a shared understanding of threats and improve cooperation before crises occur. Their task is not only to react, but to create a common security culture across regions. They monitor preparedness, support exercises, define shared priorities and coordinate communication.

Another important tool is the regional national defence course system, organised with the Finnish Defence Forces. These courses are aimed at people in key positions in public administration, municipalities, companies and organisations. They cover foreign and security policy, emergency preparedness and the responsibilities of different sectors in normal times, disruptions and emergencies. Around 25 to 28 courses are organised each year.

Since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, demand for them has doubled.

COMPREHENSIVE PREPAREDNESS IN SUPPORT OF RESILIENCE

Preparedness in Finland also extends far beyond traditional defence. In health and social services, the agency contributes to planning for radiation hazards, chemical threats, communicable diseases, water supply, waste management, cybersecurity and the continuity of critical information systems. In education and culture, the emphasis is on mental resilience, services for children and young people, legal protection and the continuity of essential community functions.

The environmental sector also has a role in comprehensive security. It supports other authorities, produces up-to-date information for decision-making and contributes to the national situational picture. As a licensing authority, it can also examine major projects from the perspective of security and resilience. Business supervision and legal protection become particularly relevant in emergencies, when retail activities may be regulated under the Emergency Powers Act or movement restricted during a state of defence.

What makes the Finnish model distinctive is the way it links national strategy with regional practice. Preparedness is not only a matter for central government. It is built through local knowledge, regular training, clear legal responsibilities and cooperation between sectors. Security is treated less as a specialised field than as a shared civic structure.

The Finnish Supervisory Agency is still new. Its operations began only in early 2026, and the process of merging 21 authorities into one organisation is complex. Its first months have largely gone as planned, but the agency is still developing its own ways of working. The challenge now is to turn a large administrative reform into a coherent and effective tool for comprehensive security.

Finland's example shows that resilience is not improvised during a crisis. It is built in advance, through law, infrastructure, training, public trust and a culture of responsibility. In an unstable security environment, the Finnish model offers a clear message: preparedness is strongest when it belongs to everyone.

Bringing civil society into the heart of local accountability

Roland BEJKO

→ Former Prefect of Berat

Albania

Since the 2015 territorial and administrative reform, Albania has profoundly reshaped its system of local government. The country moved from 373 administrative units to 61 larger municipalities. The stated aim was clear: to simplify the institutional map, strengthen the administrative capacity of local authorities, improve the allocation of public resources and bring services closer to citizens.

On paper, the reform therefore marked a step forward in terms of efficiency. Yet it also raised a major democratic question: how can larger, more powerful and sometimes more distant municipalities remain transparent, accountable and genuinely responsive to local needs?

This is the central issue explored by Roland Bejko, a PhD candidate in political and administrative sciences at the European University of Tirana. His analysis begins with a straightforward observation: territorial consolidation can improve public management, but it can also concentrate power and weaken mechanisms of civic oversight. In other words, a more efficient administration is not automatically a more democratic one.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A LOCAL COUNTERWEIGHT TO POWER

Today, citizen participation often remains limited to occasional consultations. Citizens, local associations and non-governmental organisations may be invited to express their views, but they are rarely integrated into decision-making processes in a lasting and structured way. This model has clear limits. Civil society already plays a role in monitoring, warning and providing expertise, but its work frequently encounters three obstacles: the lack of formal recognition, unequal access to public information and the financial fragility of local organisations.

The role of the "watchdog" is still too often perceived by elected officials as a form of opposition. Yet one of the strongest messages of the presentation is precisely the need to move beyond this confrontational logic. Civil society should not be treated as an external nuisance to public action, but as an institutional partner capable of improving decisions, preventing abuses and strengthening public trust.

CIVIC COUNCILS FOR PARTNERSHIP AND OVERSIGHT, A NEW TOOL FOR GOVERNANCE

To address this structural gap, Roland Bejko proposes the creation of Civic Councils for Partnership and Oversight within every municipality and regional council. These councils would have a dual mission: to take part in the design of local public policies and to provide independent oversight of their implementation.

The core idea is ambitious: to integrate civil society into the administrative architecture without compromising its independence. These councils would be formally embedded in municipal and regional charters. They would have guaranteed access to administrative documents, budgetary information and public procurement procedures. They would be able to publish independent monitoring reports, evaluate local policies and follow the execution of budgets.

> *Oversight would not be an obstacle to public action, but a guarantee of its integrity*

Such institutionalisation would profoundly change the nature of local dialogue. Criticism would no longer be merely external, belated or defensive. It would become a continuous, organised and recognised mechanism. Oversight would not be an obstacle to public action, but a guarantee of its integrity.

The composition of these councils would be crucial. The presentation stresses the need to include several categories of actors: local NGOs, neighbourhood associations, independent experts, academics, professionals and members of the Albanian diaspora. Local associations would

bring direct knowledge of the field, whether in relation to the environment, urban planning, social rights or public services. Experts would bring methodological rigour to policy evaluation. The diaspora, meanwhile, would represent a strategic resource that remains insufficiently mobilised.

This is one of the most innovative aspects of the proposal. Albanians living abroad could contribute to local governance through a dedicated digital platform. This platform would allow secure access to municipal documents, remote participation in council meetings, the submission of independent reports and the traceability of recommendations. Geographical distance would no longer prevent civic engagement.

For a country such as Albania, where a significant share of skills, capital and professional experience also exists beyond national borders, this transnational opening could become a powerful tool. The diaspora could bring technical expertise, practical experience of European governance standards and a valuable comparative perspective. Local development would no longer be solely the responsibility of those physically present in the territory, but also of those who remain attached to the country from abroad.

> ***Albanians living abroad could contribute to local governance through a dedicated digital platform***

Another strong element of the proposal is that these councils would operate on a voluntary basis. At first glance, the absence of remuneration might appear to be a weakness. The presentation presents it instead as a guarantee of independence. Volunteer members would be less exposed to local political or financial pressure.

Their legitimacy would come from civic commitment, expertise and their ability to act in the general interest.

This voluntary model would also make the system financially sustainable. It could be implemented in all municipalities, including those with limited resources. However, this would require Albanian law to clearly recognise and protect the status of civic volunteers.

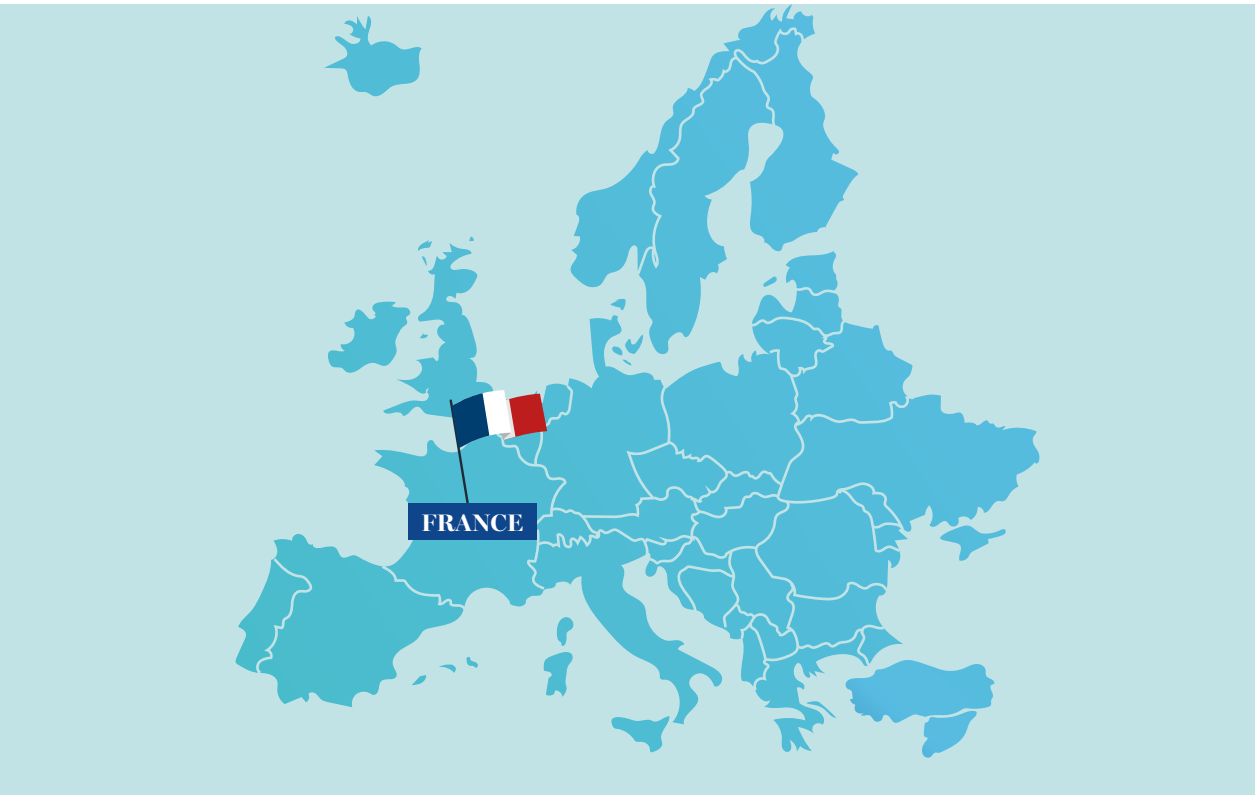
TOWARDS MORE TRANSPARENT LOCAL DEMOCRACY

The expected benefits are significant. First, greater accountability: monitoring budgets, public procurement and the quality of services would help reduce the risks of corruption, clientelism and poor resource allocation. Second, stronger institutional trust: citizens would see civic and associative representatives formally involved in local management. Third, deeper social cohesion: municipalities, NGOs, citizens and the diaspora would work within a shared framework rather than through relationships marked by mistrust.

However, the proposal depends on one essential political condition: the willingness to share part of the power of oversight. This is probably the most sensitive point. Creating such councils would not simply mean adding another consultative body. It would mean recognising that good governance requires an external, critical and competent gaze, even when that gaze is uncomfortable.

The final recommendations are therefore clear: embed the councils in national legislation and local charters, guarantee systematic access to administrative and budgetary documents, recognise the legal status of civic volunteers, deploy a digital platform to include the diaspora and, above all, show political courage.

Ultimately, this proposal defends a simple but demanding idea: territorial reform can only fully succeed if administrative efficiency is matched by stronger local democracy. Albania has redrawn its institutional map. The next challenge is to redraw the relationship between local power and citizens. Civic Councils for Partnership and Oversight would offer one possible path: transforming civil society from an external force of contestation into an internal engine of transparency, responsibility and public trust.



Foundations in Europe, the quiet sentinels of social cohesion

Christian de BOISDEFFRE

→ Administrator General of Public Finances,
Ministry of Economy

France

They do not always make the headlines. They have neither the visibility of a ministry nor the symbolic force of a major public service. Yet across Europe, foundations are playing an increasingly decisive role in the making of social ties. At the crossroads of local action, the public interest and social innovation, they often step in where needs emerge before public policy is fully able to grasp them.

The presentation on foundations in Europe describes them as a "pillar of social cohesion". The phrase is not an overstatement. On a continent shaped by health, climate, economic and democratic crises, these organisations play a distinctive role: they guarantee a form of continuity, help reduce territorial divides and experiment with new responses for the most vulnerable groups.

FOUNDATIONS PURSUE THEIR ACTION OVER THE LONG TERM

The first lesson is that foundations work over the long term. This continuity is one of their greatest strengths. Where some institutions can be slowed down by political change, budgetary constraints or administrative urgency, foundations are able to sustain public-interest missions over time. They do not replace the state, but they provide a regular, sometimes vital, presence for populations that crises make even more exposed.

> *They are rooted, yet able to move fast*

This stability becomes particularly meaningful in moments of disruption. The presentation notes that foundations act "where others withdraw". During the Covid-19 crisis, or through schemes such as heatwave plans, their ability to mobilise teams, networks and resources quickly made it possible to respond to immediate needs: supporting isolated people, assisting social organisations, and maintaining local services. Their strength lies as much in their reliability as in their agility. They are rooted, yet able to move fast. A rare quality, almost an administrative combat sport, minus the theatrical arm-flailing. This enables them to respond to emergencies by deploying teams or mobilizing local partners around the world. They are active on all fronts: earthquakes, floods, migration crises, and wars.

TERRITORIAL EQUITY

The second pillar is territorial equity. European inequalities are not only social; they are also geographical. Some rural areas are losing population, some urban neighbourhoods concentrate multiple forms of hardship, and essential services do not always keep pace. In this context, foundations can help maintain a fine-grained presence across territories. Their work is not limited to one-off funding: they can establish a lasting presence, create non-relocatable jobs in education or social care, organise visits, develop mediation and rebuild links with isolated groups.

> *European inequalities are not only social; they are also geographical*

This role is especially valuable in places where a sense of abandonment feeds mistrust. A foundation supporting a local project, a school, a neighbourhood association or a home-visit programme will not, on its own, solve Europe's fractures. But it can prevent some people from slipping entirely off the radar. It can also restore the capacity to act to local organisations that know the terrain better than anyone.

INNOVATION

The third strand is innovation. Foundations are described as laboratories for social experimentation. This means they can test approaches before they are potentially scaled up by public authorities. They often have a freedom of movement that large administrations do not always possess. They can fund a pilot project, assess a method, quickly correct what does not work, and then document the results.

The innovation discussed here is not only technological, even though digital tools are among the possible solutions. It also concerns the way users are involved in local decision-making. This is a crucial point.

The strongest social policies are rarely those written far away from the people concerned. By including beneficiaries in the process, foundations can help design responses that are fairer, more practical and less top-down.

The European picture, however, reveals considerable diversity.

> *The strongest social policies are rarely those written far away from the people concerned*

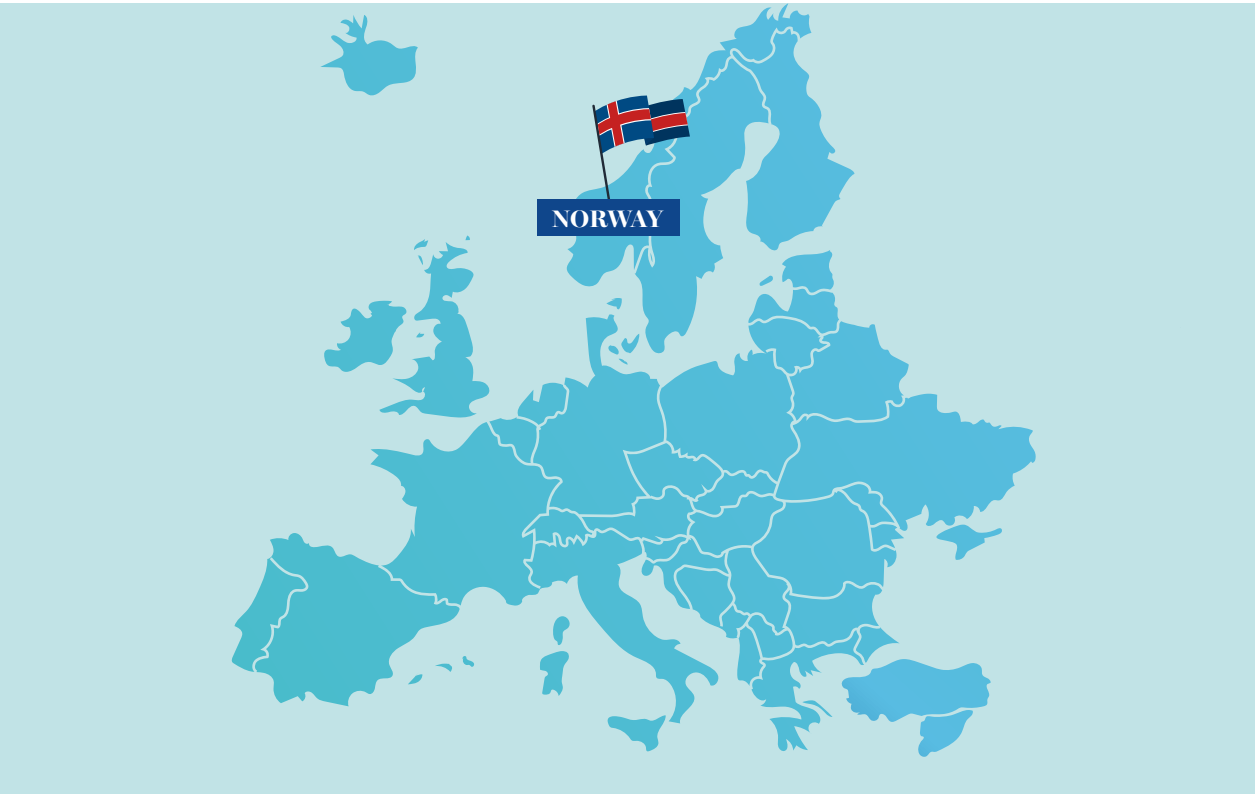
In the Netherlands, the share of "social benefit" stands at around 34 %, one of the highest known proportions among the documented countries. In Germany, social work represents around 46 % of foundation statutes, although the financial breakdown is less precise. In France, social issues concern a quarter of foundations, but only around 6 % of spending, with the largest budgets concentrated more heavily in health and research, with the government, local authorities, and the national health insurance system covering the bulk of the costs. In Italy, banking foundations allocate around 17 % to social causes, behind education and culture. In the Czech Republic, exclusion, disability and childhood together account for almost 36 % among the largest foundations. Austria stands out for its high number of foundations active in social services, while Sweden is an exception, with a marginal social sector because of the role of the government and a clear priority given to research.

These figures are a reminder that it would be misleading to speak of European foundations as a homogeneous bloc. Philanthropic traditions, legal frameworks, the weight of the welfare state and national priorities vary considerably. Yet a common thread emerges.

In most countries, foundations occupy an intermediate space between public authorities, associations, local government and citizens. They are not a decorative supplement to solidarity. They are sometimes the place where vulnerabilities are detected before they turn into breakdowns.

The document's conclusion is clear: foundations should be seen as strategic partners. Not substitutes for the state, which would be both dangerous and politically lazy, but allies able to warn, experiment, complement and connect. Their value lies in this close cooperation: identifying problems early, preventing people from dropping out, supporting territories and encouraging new responses.

At a time when Europe is trying to preserve its cohesion in the face of social divides, climate crises and an ageing population, the role of foundations deserves to be better understood. Their work is often discreet, but its impact can be profound. They do not claim to repair the European social contract on their own. They can, however, help prevent it from quietly coming apart. And in an age when noise so often prevails over care, that is not exactly a minor detail.



Norway's total defence model: resilience as a national habit

Dr Tom Cato KARLSEN

→ Governor of Nordland County

Norway

In Norway, defence is not only a military matter. It is a way of organising society. The Norwegian concept of "total defence", presented by Dr Tom C. Karlsen, County Governor of Nordland, rests on a simple but powerful principle: in a serious crisis, civilian society and the armed forces must be able to support each other, from peace, through crisis, to war.

A SOCIETY ORGANIZED TO FACE CRISES

This approach is rooted in geography, history and necessity. Norway is a vast country, with long coastlines, remote communities, Arctic conditions, strategic infrastructure and a position that matters greatly to European and NATO security. In such a context, resilience cannot be improvised. It must be planned, tested and shared across institutions before the emergency arrives.

The total defence concept is based on mutual support between the Norwegian Armed Forces and civilian society. This cooperation applies to prevention, contingency planning, crisis management and consequence management. In practice, it means that defence is not confined to barracks, weapons and military command structures. It also involves municipalities, counties, ministries, emergency services, infrastructure operators, health services, transport, customs, meteorological services, police, telecommunications, energy, private companies and the population itself.

> *In such a context, resilience cannot be improvised*

One of the strongest messages of the presentation is that modern threats do not respect administrative borders. A crisis may begin as a cyberattack, an extreme weather event, a disruption to transport, a military escalation or a failure of critical infrastructure. Very quickly, it may require both civilian and military resources. The Norwegian answer is therefore not to separate the two worlds too rigidly, but to make sure they know how to work together when pressure rises.

COORDINATING STAKEHOLDERS, FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL TO NATO

This is where structures matter. The presentation highlights the National Total Defence Forum, which brings together senior actors from the civilian and military sides. Such a forum is not symbolic decoration. It is a practical tool to build a shared understanding of risks, mandates and responsibilities. In a crisis, confusion over "who does what" can cost time. Norway's model aims to reduce that uncertainty by clarifying roles before decisions become urgent.

The same logic applies across national, regional and local levels. Public security is organised through a chain of responsibilities, from national authorities to regional actors, county governors, municipalities and emergency councils. The key question is not simply whether each institution has a plan, but whether those plans fit together. A resilient system is not a pile of separate strategies. It is a network of actors who understand each other's responsibilities and can coordinate quickly.

The year 2026 is presented as Norway's "Year of Total Defence". In cooperation with civilian authorities and the Norwegian Armed Forces, the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection is applying a full-scale framework to strengthen the country's ability to prevent, manage and respond to security challenges, large-scale incidents and war. The objectives are concrete: strengthen resilience in critical infrastructure, improve the civilian sector's ability to support the armed forces, develop knowledge of host nation support, protect the population during wartime and increase resilience across society.

Host nation support is a particularly important point. In a NATO context, Norway must be able to receive, move and support allied forces on its territory. That involves far more than military planning. Roads, ports, airports, customs, fuel supply, communication networks, local authorities

and civilian contractors may all become part of the defence effort. The presentation's images of convoys, logistics, customs and emergency coordination show that total defence is as much about practical organisation as strategic doctrine.

RESILIENCE BUILT ON TRUST

Another central idea is the "all-hazards approach". The same structures that help manage natural disasters, infrastructure breakdowns or major accidents can also be useful in war or security escalations. This does not mean treating every crisis as a military threat. It means building flexible systems that can adapt to different types of shock. A storm, a pandemic, a cyberattack and a military escalation are different events, but they all test coordination, communication, resources and trust.

> ***Trust is perhaps the deepest foundation of the Norwegian model***

Trust is perhaps the deepest foundation of the Norwegian model. The presentation insists on trust in systems, mandates and decision-making. This is not a soft value added at the end of technical planning. It is operationally decisive. When institutions trust each other, they can share resources, take decisions and act under pressure. When the population trusts authorities, people are more likely to follow advice, prepare themselves and support collective efforts.

Resilience therefore extends beyond government organisations. It also concerns society, individual organisations and citizens. The reference to NATO Article 3 is important here: each member state must have the resilience to withstand shocks such as natural disasters, critical infrastructure failure and military attacks.

Resilience is described as society's ability to resist and recover, combining civilian, economic, commercial and military factors. In other words, the first line of defence is not always a soldier. It may be a prepared municipality, a functioning hospital, a protected power grid, a trained civil servant, a reliable logistics chain or a household that can manage for several days.

PREPARING BEFORE AN EMERGENCY OCCURS

This is the most useful lesson for a wider public. Total defence is not a call to militarise daily life. It is a call to take preparedness seriously. The model recognises that security in the twenty-first century depends on many ordinary systems working under extraordinary pressure. Food supply, transport, electricity, digital networks, local leadership and public information all become strategic when disruption strikes.

The Norwegian experience also shows that resilience is built before the crisis, not during it. Once a major incident begins, it is too late to discover that databases cannot be shared, that mandates are unclear, that local authorities have not trained together or that citizens do not know what to do. Preparation may look dull compared with emergency action, but it is what makes emergency action possible.

The final message is clear. Total defence is not only a national security doctrine. It is a culture of coordination. It asks every level of society to understand its role, share competence and act for the benefit of all. In an age of hybrid threats, climate shocks and geopolitical uncertainty, Norway's model offers a practical warning to other countries: resilience cannot be delegated to the army, the police or central government alone. It must be organised across society, patiently, collectively and before it is needed.

Governors mobilized to address social vulnerabilities

Sebahattin ÖZTÜRK

→ Governor, President of the Association of Turkish Governors

Türkiye

Faced with major demographic changes, Türkiye is relying on the action of its territorial representatives to strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable groups. Education, disability, women's employment, health, disaster preparedness: in provinces and districts, governors play a key role in implementing projects on the ground.

Ageing, migration, slowing population growth, declining fertility rates and changing family structures: major demographic shifts now affect societies worldwide. In Türkiye, they directly question the ability of public authorities to protect groups most exposed to health crises, disasters, poverty and unequal access to essential services.

In this context, demographic resilience is becoming increasingly important. It refers to a society's ability to understand the changes affecting its population, anticipate their consequences, withstand crises and adapt. Conversely, vulnerability refers to the difficulties faced by certain individuals or groups in coping psychologically, socially or physically with life's hardships.

With more than 86 million inhabitants in 2025 and an almost equal distribution between men and women, Türkiye is seeking to strengthen its action for vulnerable groups. This strategy relies in particular on the territorial organization of the State, which makes it possible to implement national policies as closely as possible to local realities.

A TERRITORIAL NETWORK SERVING LOCAL ACTION

Türkiye is divided into 81 provinces and 922 districts. In each province, the governor represents the central State. In each district, the district governor performs a comparable role under the authority of the provincial governor. Together, they coordinate public policies, ensure the enforcement of laws, guarantee the continuity of public services and contribute to maintaining public order and security.

But their role is not limited to day-to-day administration. Through their knowledge of the field, they are also on the front line in identifying local needs and supporting the most vulnerable populations. This action is supported in particular by a network of 1,003 social welfare and solidarity foundations, present in all provinces and districts of the country.

Chaired by governors at provincial level and by district governors at local level, these foundations also bring together mayors, administrative officials, civil society representatives, village heads and members of provincial assemblies. Funded by regular transfers from a national fund, they provide assistance to the most vulnerable groups and support projects tailored to the specific needs of each territory.

> *A network of 1,003 social welfare and solidarity foundations, present in all provinces and districts of the country*

This system illustrates a form of local governance in which the central State, local authorities and actors on the ground work together to reduce social vulnerabilities.

CONCRETE PROJECTS FOR VULNERABLE GROUPS

Every year, on January 10, Türkiye celebrates Governors' Day. In 2025, following a call by the Turkish Association of Governors, 42 deputy governors and district governors were nominated for five awards. Their applications included 586 projects and activities. After evaluation, five winners were honored during the program organized on January 10, 2026.

The initiatives presented show the diversity of responses provided on the ground. In Istanbul, in the district of Sancaktepe, the project "My Teacher, Me and My Friend" targets public middle and high school students who have become disengaged from school because of absenteeism. Its objective is to rebuild links with the school institution and prevent lasting breaks in educational pathways.

In the district of İnegöl, in Bursa province, the "+1 University" project enables people with special needs aged 23 and over to experience university life through training organized on a campus.

The initiative recognizes their desire to learn, participate in social life and gain autonomy.

Disability is also at the heart of the "Are You Aware of Me?" project, carried out in Afyonkarahisar province with European Union funding. It prepares people with disabilities and their caregivers for disasters, while also integrating them into risk management processes. The aim is no longer to see them solely as recipients of assistance, but as actors in their own protection.

EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH, RECONSTRUCTION: RESILIENCE IN ACTION

In Hakkâri province, a women's empowerment project transformed a former small shopping center, which had fallen into disuse, into a space dedicated to women entrepreneurs. The initiative supports women's employment, encourages local economic activity and creates new opportunities in a territory where women's access to work may remain limited.

Disaster preparedness is another major area of action. In the district of Çamlıhemşin, in Rize province, a project led to the creation of a volunteer-based search and rescue association. It aims to strengthen risk awareness, local preparedness capacities and the equipment available to mobilized teams.

The earthquakes of February 6, 2023 also led to very concrete responses. In Hatay province, nearly 1,000 people lost a limb as a result of the disaster. The Social Entrepreneurship Center for People with Disabilities responds to a vital need for access to prostheses and orthoses. Since opening, it has processed 574 applications and provided equipment to 120 amputees.

In Van province, the "Healthy Women, Healthy Generations" project aims to improve health literacy, facilitate access to basic screenings and promote healthier lifestyle habits. The approach recalls that acting for women also means supporting the balance of families and future generations.

Through these examples, Türkiye highlights a very operational understanding of resilience. It is not reduced to an institutional principle: it takes the form of targeted projects, rooted in local territories and led by State representatives capable of coordinating local actors.

> *Acting for women also means supporting the balance of families and future generations*

Education, disability, health, employment, disaster preparedness: the projects led by governors show that structured public action, adapted to realities on the ground, can become an essential lever to support vulnerable populations and strengthen social cohesion.

Artificial Intelligence in the service of the state : a powerful tool, provided we know how to use it

Boris CUANOUD

→ Prefect of the District of Morges

Switzerland

Presented at JERTE 2026 in Tirana by Boris Cuanoud, Prefect of the District of Morges in the Canton of Vaud in Switzerland, this presentation offers a practical reflection on the role of artificial intelligence in public administration. Its starting point is clear: AI is no longer a distant possibility. The question for public institutions is no longer whether they should engage with it, but how they should use it.

The presentation first explains how large language models actually work. An LLM does not think, understand like a human being, or spontaneously check the truth of what it says. It predicts the most likely next word based on the text it has been given. This mechanism is enough to produce texts that appear coherent, but it does not guarantee truthfulness, accuracy or reproducibility. Unlike a search engine, which retrieves existing information from indexed documents, a language model generates a new answer every time it is called.

UNDERSTANDING THE POWER AND LIMITATIONS OF MODELS

Several technical notions help explain both the power and the weakness of generative AI. Tokens are the basic units the model manipulates: fragments of words or punctuation. Semantic vector spaces represent meaning across thousands of dimensions. Temperature controls how variable the answers can be, from deterministic to more inventive. Parameters are the learned values that form the model's internal knowledge. The context window defines how much information the model can draw on during an exchange. Together, these concepts show why AI can be extremely useful, but also why it must be handled with care.

> *What AI produces is not the final product, it is where human work begins*

The most important limitation is hallucination. A hallucination is factually incorrect content produced by exactly the same mechanism as correct content. The model does not, by itself, distinguish truth from plausibility.

The danger is particularly subtle because true and false elements can appear in the same sentence, stated with equal confidence. In an administrative context, this has a direct consequence: factual information must never be accepted without verification, especially when important decisions are involved. What AI produces is not the final product, it is where human work begins.

HUMAN EXPERTISE AT THE HEART OF PUBLIC-SECTOR APPLICATIONS

To reduce these risks, the presentation introduces more controlled uses of AI, such as RAG, or Retrieval-Augmented Generation. This method injects relevant content from a specific document base into the prompt, for example a repository of legal texts. The AI then answers from identified documents rather than relying only on general knowledge. MCP, or Model Context Protocol, is presented as a bridge that connects AI to external tools and databases. The core message is straightforward: AI cannot use data it has not been connected to. Without reliable access, it may invent rather than admit ignorance.

> *AI does not replace subject-matter expertise*

In public administration, the issue is therefore not only technical. It is also professional. Boris Cuanoud insists on the need to master one's craft before the tool. A 3D modelling programme, however powerful, will not turn someone who cannot design a building into an architect. In the same way, AI does not replace subject-matter expertise. A professional who knows their field and learns to use AI will obtain better results than an AI specialist who does not understand the subject. The good news is that competent people already possess the essential skill: judgement. The risk is the illusion of competence, when a fluent answer is mistaken for a reliable one.

Best practices are based on a few simple principles. Users must formulate precise requests, iterate, refine, reject, deliberately test the limits of AI in their field, and build real AI literacy. Article 4 of the European AI Regulation furthermore states that providers and deployers of AI systems must ensure a sufficient level of AI literacy among the persons who use these systems or operate them.

SUPPORTING TRANSFORMATION WITH CLEAR-EYED JUDGMENT

The potential use cases for administration are numerous. AI can help make legal and regulatory databases searchable in natural language. It can summarise long administrative documents, reports, briefs and meeting minutes. It can assist with drafting notes, letters and internal documents. It can also support cross-source searches across scattered document repositories where traditional tools struggle. But all these uses must remain under human supervision. AI proposes, humans decide. Administrations must define what can safely be shared with AI tools, protect data, preserve digital sovereignty and systematically verify sources.

The presentation then broadens the perspective to the social and economic effects of AI. AI extends a logic already seen with mechanisation: it increases human capacity, but also transforms work. Where machines once reduced the need for manual labour, AI may now reshape administrative and intellectual tasks.

This raises the issue of skills transfer and professional reconversion. A tension appears between exponential technological acceleration and slower, linear human adaptation. Resilience will mean designing systems that respect the human tempo while still benefiting from innovation.

The complementarity between humans and AI is therefore crucial. Humans bring critical thinking, judgement, creativity, intuition, knowledge of real-world context and the final decision. AI brings processing speed, the ability to handle large volumes of information, pattern recognition and constant availability. AI may not replace a person, but a person using AI may replace one who does not.

> ***AI proposes, humans decide***

Finally, the presentation underlines the ethical and philosophical stakes: deepfakes, synthetic voices, the blurring of truth and falsehood in the public sphere, and the shifting value of human work. Humanity will adapt, but the question is at what cost. AI will become what societies decide to make of it. For public administrations, the challenge is to adopt it lucidly: with neither naive fascination nor defensive rejection, but with a demanding, critical and responsible approach.

National resilience : Belgium prepares for crisis before it strikes

Cathy BERX

→ Governor of Antwerp

Belgium

"*The readiness is all.*" Shakespeare's line, placed at the opening of Governor Cathy Berx's presentation, could serve as a motto for modern public policy. In a world where crises are no longer exceptional events but recurring possibilities, preparedness is no longer an administrative luxury. It has become a condition for collective survival.

CONNECTING STAKEHOLDERS IN THE FACE OF MULTIPLE RISKS

The presentation on the Belgian National Defence Plan, known as BND-P Shield, makes one point particularly clear: resilience cannot be improvised once a disaster has already struck. It must be built beforehand, through prevention, coordination, training and the continuity of essential services. In other words, having an emergency plan is not enough. The actors involved must know one another, responsibilities must be clear, and the various systems must be able to work together.

Belgium has a strong tradition of crisis management. Yet one of the most lucid findings of the BNDP is that this tradition is still sometimes fragmented. Excellent contingency plans do not automatically produce effective operational continuity. Stronger prevention measures do not necessarily lead to robust crisis management. The challenge is therefore not only to possess the right tools, but to connect them.

This need for coordination becomes even more urgent when considering the scale of the risks identified. The National Crisis Centre has listed 118 defined risks, covering a wide range of areas: societal, health, cyber, natural, economic, technological and emerging risks. Alongside this, the Belgian Climate Risk Assessment highlights the concrete effects of climate disruption, including floods, droughts, pressure on infrastructure and strain on public services. Crisis no longer has a single face. It may come from extreme weather, computer networks, supply chains, borders or the climate itself.

> *The central state cannot do everything alone*

This is why Belgium's strategy is built around a "whole-of-government" and "whole-of-society" approach. Put simply, the central state cannot do everything alone. National security involves federal authorities, regions and communities, municipalities, emergency services, civil society, the private sector, academia and the population itself. This broader approach is essential. In a real emergency, the first response often comes from the ground: a municipality opening a reception centre, an association organising aid, a company keeping critical infrastructure running, citizens sharing official instructions or supporting vulnerable neighbours.

BRINGING TOGETHER DEFENSE, RESILIENCE, AND LOCAL ACTION

BND-P Shield is therefore presented as an integrated civil-military crisis plan. It forms part of the National Security Strategy and is coordinated by Defence and the National Crisis Centre. Its objectives are clear: to protect the population and national territory, strengthen national resilience, ensure the continuity of essential services, and enable rapid response and recovery. Defending the country is no longer limited to the military sphere. It also includes hospitals, telecommunications, local administrations, emergency services, public information and the ability to return to a functioning daily life after a shock.

The approach also distinguishes between several complementary dimensions. On one side, the Belgian National Resilience Plan focuses on civil preparedness, the continuity of essential services and local self-reliance. On the other, the Belgian National Enablement Plan concerns the reinforcement and support of armed forces, especially within an international and NATO framework. The message is straightforward: modern defence relies on the articulation of internal security, international cooperation and everyday resilience.

In Belgium, this articulation is made more complex by the country's federal structure, where powers are divided between several levels of government. The presentation recalls that communities and regions may take emergency measures within their own territory, but that these measures must be coordinated with the federal government to ensure more effective crisis management. This multi-level approach is not a mere technicality. It determines the speed and coherence of the response. A crisis does not respect administrative borders or institutional subtleties. Public systems must therefore learn to communicate before urgency forces them to do so.

> *Defending the country is no longer limited to the military sphere*

Annex J of BND-P Shield gives a very concrete example of this ambition. It focuses on the protection of the population and institutions in the event of a serious threat. The measures identified include warning and informing the public, evacuation, accommodation, shelter, repair and recovery capacities, continuity of emergency services and local authorities, the use of volunteers, and liaison officers for local authorities. Once again, the central idea is simple: a protected population is an informed population, guided and supported by structures capable of acting.

ASSESSING CAPABILITIES AND MOBILIZING CITIZENS

To assess the actual level of preparedness, two surveys were conducted among Belgian municipalities in 2026. The first, carried out in January, gathered responses from 454 out of 565 municipalities and focused on business continuity planning: plans and procedures, infrastructure and logistics, information and cyber resilience, staff and communication. The second, conducted in March, received responses from 503 municipalities and focused on five areas: warning and alerting, volunteers, evacuation, shelters, and repair and recovery. The aim is to identify what actually exists and where weaknesses remain.

> *Security is not only a matter of vertical command*

Among the initiatives highlighted, the governor of Antwerp plays a significant role. A two-day conference on resilience was organised with provincial governors and the ambassadors of Finland, Poland and Ukraine. Finland is often cited for its culture of civil preparedness, Poland for its strategic role in Eastern Europe, and Ukraine for its painfully concrete experience of war and national mobilisation. Belgian resilience is also shaped by foreign experience, especially from countries directly confronted with major threats.

One of the most striking projects is the creation of a municipal crisis volunteer corps. In Flanders, each municipality is encouraged to develop a pool of trained citizens able to provide support during major events. Their role would not be to replace emergency services, but to allow professionals to focus on their core tasks. Distributing equipment, providing logistical support, helping receive displaced people, relaying information: such tasks may appear modest, but they become decisive when professional services are under severe pressure.

This proposal reflects a broader vision: preparedness must become structural resilience. The governor refers to very practical tools, such as family or local emergency plans, preparedness kits, information guides and alert systems.

These are not spectacular objects. They are almost ordinary. Yet they express a deeper insight: security is not only a matter of vertical command. It also depends on daily habits, shared reflexes, trusted networks and a civic culture of responsibility.

MAKING RESILIENCE A DEMOCRATIC CAPABILITY

The presentation ends with seven key messages. The necessary steps are being taken. The process matters, because resilience must be improved systematically. Different projects and processes must be aligned. The outcome must remain dynamic. Citizens and institutions must become more self-reliant and resilient. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Finally, as the French saying quoted in the presentation puts it: “Qui peut le plus, peut le moins” — those who can do more, can also do less.

At its core, BND-P Shield defends a simple but demanding idea: preparing for the worst does not mean living in fear. On the contrary, it is a way of preserving the possibility of normal life. As the concluding quotation from Lucy Easthope suggests, preparedness means accepting that disasters will come, while still choosing to live fully. This is the spirit of the plan: clarity without panic, anticipation without paralysis, responsibility without fatalism.

> *Clarity without panic, anticipation without paralysis, responsibility without fatalism*

In an age saturated with uncertainty, resilience is becoming a democratic skill. The real question is no longer simply whether a crisis will come. It is whether, when it does, institutions, territories and citizens will already have learnt how to respond together.

Artificial intelligence in crisis management : the Brussels region tests the future of resilience

Sophie LAVAUX

→ Governor for Crisis Management, Brussels Region

Belgium

For public authorities, crisis management has entered a new age. Floods, fires, cyberattacks, terrorist threats, infrastructure failures, major public gatherings and disinformation campaigns no longer unfold in neat, isolated categories. They overlap, accelerate and reinforce one another. This is the starting point of the presentation delivered by Sophie Lavaux on artificial intelligence and crisis management in the Brussels-Capital Region: today's crises are systemic, hybrid and interconnected.

FROM SYSTEMIC CRISES TO THE DATA CHALLENGE

A systemic crisis affects several sectors at once. A heatwave, for example, is not only a health issue. It can put pressure on hospitals, transport, schools, energy networks and vulnerable populations. A hybrid crisis combines different kinds of threats, sometimes physical, digital and social at the same time. An interconnected crisis creates domino effects: one disruption triggers another, and the consequences spread faster than institutions can traditionally respond.

Against this backdrop, artificial intelligence is not presented as a miracle solution. It is described as one component of a wider socio-technical system, alongside data and human stakeholders. That distinction matters. Crisis management is not about replacing people with machines. It is about helping public authorities, emergency services and citizens make better decisions under pressure.

The first building block is data. Brussels region, like many large metropolitan areas, produces and contains enormous quantities of data.

> *The first building block is data*

At region level, the challenge becomes even more complex. Brussels is a dense web of schools, hospitals, nurseries, elderly care facilities, prisons, public transport stations, major events, football stadiums, European institutions, NATO sites and Seveso industrial locations. Each of these places may become relevant in a crisis. The issue is not that data is lacking. Often, there is too much of it, scattered across systems, formats and institutions. The real challenge is to transform raw data into structured, reliable and usable data for AI models.

ANTICIPATING AND TAKING ACTION THROUGH ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

In the coming years, AI will be a powerful tool for crisis management professionals. Currently, various initiatives are already in place. In the preparedness phase, it can simulate crisis scenarios, support exercises and identify gaps in planning. It can analyse live video feeds, for instance from AI-powered cameras monitoring wildfires, and detect smoke or fire earlier than a human operator might. It can support conversational tools during floods, helping citizens access real-time updates and reliable instructions. It can also combine satellite imagery and geological data to improve landslide forecasting. In all these cases, AI is useful because it helps authorities anticipate, prepare and reduce risk before the crisis peaks.

During the response phase, the potential uses become even more immediate. Drones equipped with computer vision can assess damage after an explosion, flood or fire. AI systems can monitor crowd density in real time at large events, helping prevent bottlenecks and unsafe movements. Emergency call centres can use AI-assisted tools to transcribe calls, detect urgency and help dispatch the right resources faster. Decision-support systems can analyse multiple streams of data and provide operational insights to crisis managers.

> *A faster overview of the situation can save lives*

These examples show why AI attracts so much attention. In a crisis, minutes matter. A faster overview of the situation can save lives. Better anticipation can prevent panic. More accurate information can reduce confusion. But the presentation is careful not to turn AI into a technological fantasy. It also highlights serious risks and limitations.

MANAGING RISKS TO BUILD TRUST

The first risk is data quality. AI systems depend on the information they receive. If the data is incomplete, outdated, biased or badly structured, the result may be misleading. This is especially sensitive in crisis management, where rare events are difficult to model because there may be limited data from previous comparable situations. The second risk is hallucination: AI can produce inaccurate or misleading responses while sounding confident. In ordinary contexts, this is annoying. In a crisis, it can become dangerous.

There are also strategic and political risks. Relying on non-sovereign AI systems may create dependence on external providers. Cybersecurity becomes crucial, since any system used in crisis management can itself become a target. Privacy and ethics must be central, especially when tools involve geolocation, cameras, crowds or vulnerable populations. Another risk is the gradual reduction of human expertise. If professionals become too dependent on automated systems, they may lose the ability to interpret uncertainty, exercise judgement and take moral responsibility.

> ***Trust cannot be improvised during an emergency***

Trust is therefore the central condition. The presentation identifies several pillars: reliable AI systems, transparency, data sharing, privacy and ethics, training and exercises, and continuous evaluation. Trust cannot be improvised during an emergency. It must be built before the crisis, through clear rules, tested procedures and honest communication between government, emergency services and citizens.

PRESERVING HUMAN DECISION-MAKING AND RESPONSIBILITY

The Brussels use case on AI for mass evacuation illustrates this approach. In a dense urban region, evacuation is never a purely technical operation. It involves transport networks, crowd behaviour, emergency services, public messaging, vulnerable people, infrastructure constraints and fast-changing risks. AI may help model flows, identify congestion points and support decision-making. But it cannot carry political responsibility. It cannot replace leadership, public trust or coordination between actors.

> ***Resilience is not artificial; it is human***

That is the final message of the presentation. AI is not replacing crisis management. It is transforming it. It supports decisions, but responsibility remains human. Resilience is not artificial; it is human. Technology can help detect, calculate and accelerate, but it cannot decide what a society values, whom it protects first, or how it communicates with citizens when fear rises.

For Brussels, as for other European regions, the lesson is clear. The future of crisis management will depend neither on technology alone nor on traditional procedures alone. It will depend on the ability to bring data, AI and human judgement into the same room, before the emergency arrives. In the words attributed to Winston Churchill at the end of the presentation, it is better to take change by the hand before it takes us by the throat.

Social media : ten years on, crisis has changed shape

Benoît RAMACKER

→ Director at safe.brussels

Belgium

In 2016, during the Brussels attacks, social media already appeared as a major player in crisis situations. It was used to warn, reassure, bear witness and, at times, to spread panic. Ten years later, Benoît Ramacker's presentation for safe.brussels offers a more troubling diagnosis: the question is no longer simply whether social networks are in crisis, but whether they have, to a significant extent, become "asocial" networks.

FROM IMMEDIATE EMERGENCY TO THE DIGITAL ARCHIPELAGO

Zaventem remains a telling starting point. The presentation captures the shock of the first few minutes: the explosion, the fragmented early information, and the institutional messages that had to arrive quickly, even before all the facts had been confirmed. At 7.58, then 8.15, then 8.27, the crisis almost narrates itself in real time. In such situations, an information vacuum is dangerous. If it is not filled by reliable communication, it is filled by rumours, images taken out of context, anxious commentary and false certainties.

The first lesson is therefore simple, but demanding: in a crisis, speed is no longer enough. Communication must be fast, accurate, understandable and human. An institution that speaks too late loses the battle for attention. One that speaks too quickly, without caution, loses the battle for trust. The challenge lies in that uncomfortable middle ground: saying what is known, saying what is not yet known, and explaining what is being verified.

> *In a crisis, speed is no longer enough*

The second lesson lies in the transformation of the ecosystem itself. In 2016, Twitter still embodied the public space of crisis communication. In 2026, Twitter has become X, and the change of name symbolises a deeper shift: platforms are less stable, less readable, and more dependent on their owners, algorithms and business models. Public authorities can no longer build their strategy around a single channel. What once looked like a digital public square now resembles a moving archipelago, where each island has its own codes, audiences, excesses and blind spots.

UNDERSTANDING INVISIBLE FLOWS

The figures presented on daily social media use among Belgians aged 16 to 39 show the scale of the challenge. WhatsApp comes first, at 71.8 %, ahead of Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Messenger. TikTok reaches almost one young adult in two. Telegram, Discord, Reddit, Twitch and Threads are less dominant in mass usage, but may matter greatly within specific communities. The message is clear : "social media" is no longer a single space. It is a mosaic of uses, where information sometimes circulates publicly, sometimes in closed groups, sometimes through screenshots, and sometimes as videos, memes or voice notes.

> *What we can see is only a small part of what is moving*

This is where "dark social" becomes central. The presentation reminds us that a very large share of social sharing escapes conventional tracking tools: 84 % would fall into these private or semi-private forms of circulation, compared with only 16 % for public and trackable social media. In other words, what we can see is only a small part of what is moving. For an authority responsible for safety or prevention, this changes everything. It is no longer enough to monitor public trends. Authorities must understand communities, work with trusted intermediaries, prepare messages designed to be forwarded, and make sure useful information can travel where institutions cannot see.

DISINFORMATION, AI, AND THE ATTENTION ECONOMY

The third lesson concerns disinformation. The examples linked to the war in Ukraine show how an image, a video or a testimony can be recycled, distorted or fabricated to create immediate emotion. Fake news does not always try to convince people for long. Often, it aims to trigger a reflex: outrage, fear, anger, suspicion. In a crisis, that reflex can waste precious time, divert attention from useful instructions, or weaken trust in public authorities.

> *Nuance, meanwhile, tends to travel economy class, without priority boarding*

Generative artificial intelligence now adds another layer to this mechanism. The presentation refers to the rise of AI-generated content, especially images, on major platforms. Once again, the problem is not only technical. It is cultural. We are entering a world in which seeing is no longer enough to believe, but believing nothing at all is just as dangerous. The right response is therefore not blanket scepticism. It is a culture of verification: source, date, context, author, intention, cross-checking. A form of information hygiene, as ordinary and necessary as washing one's hands during an epidemic.

The economic dimension should not be overlooked. The appearance of TikTok Shop in the presentation is a reminder that platforms are not merely spaces for conversation. They are also commercial machines. They capture attention, steer behaviour, and sell objects, ideas and emotions. This market logic can come into tension with the public interest: what circulates best is not always what informs best. Scandal, fear and anger are excellent algorithmic fuel. Nuance, meanwhile, tends to travel economy class, without priority boarding.

REBUILDING NETWORKS OF TRUST

Faced with this landscape, crisis communication must change scale. It can no longer be purely top-down. It must be prepared before the crisis, tested, multilingual, visual, platform-aware and able to move from an official statement to a shareable message. It must also accept that different audiences need to be addressed differently, without losing coherence. A message intended for a journalist, a worried parent, a young person on TikTok or a neighbourhood WhatsApp group cannot be exactly the same. But all of them must carry the same reference points: what is happening, what to do, where to find reliable information, and when the next update will come.

The document's final message may be the most political. Social networks are not just tools. They shape our relationship to reality, fear, others and institutions. Calling them "asocial" is not an empty provocation: it is a reminder that a network can connect without creating bonds, amplify without clarifying, and mobilise without fostering responsibility. The crisis of social media is therefore also a crisis of collective trust.

> *The crisis of social media is therefore also a crisis of collective trust*

Responding to it will require more than opening an account on the latest fashionable platform. It will require training, anticipation, listening, verification and cooperation. It will require rebuilding circuits of trust capable of crossing digital bubbles. In 2016, the urgency was to speak quickly in a stunned public space. In 2026, the task is to speak accurately in a fragmented, opaque and saturated one. It is less simple. It is also more necessary.

The Evolution of Territorial Governance

Maria Cristina CARUSO

→ Deputy Prefect, Ministry of the Interior,
Directorate General of the National Police

Italy

At the EASTR and ANFACI meetings in Tirana, Maria Cristina Caruso, Italian deputy prefect and Ministry of the Interior official, outlined the role of the prefect within Italy's administrative system. Drawing on more than thirty years of experience, her presentation shed light on an institution that is little understood, yet essential to the functioning of the state.

A ROLE SHAPED BY EXPERIENCE ON THE GROUND

Since joining the civil service in 1994, Maria Cristina Caruso has held a wide range of responsibilities, both in prefectural offices and at the ministry: legal affairs, public security, administration of municipalities in crisis, extraordinary commissions, and management of local authorities facing financial distress. This background allows her to discuss the prefect's role not as an abstract concept, but as a hands-on function shaped by emergencies and local vulnerabilities.

Italy's Ministry of the Interior has a complex structure built around five departments: territorial affairs; immigration and civil liberties; fire and civil defence; public security; and general administration and resources. This breadth explains the wide-ranging responsibilities assigned to prefects. As representatives of the state in the provinces, they work across fields including security, elections, civil protection, immigration, social mediation, support for local authorities, and upholding legality and the rule of law.

> *The office of prefect has gained renewed legitimacy*

Throughout Italian history, the office of prefect has evolved considerably. Created within a highly centralised state, it has had to adapt to the growing importance of the regions, provinces and municipalities. Far from disappearing with decentralisation, the office of prefect has gained renewed legitimacy. The prefect no longer embodies only top-down authority from Rome. The role has become a point of balance between central government and the local level, coordinating multiple institutions and safeguarding democratic cohesion in a more horizontal system.

THE PREFECT: A LINK BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE LOCAL LEVEL

This connecting role is central to Caruso's argument. The Italian prefect is at once the government's general representative, a guardian of the public interest and a mediator among local stakeholders. The prefect channels information between the local level and central government. Through the prefectural offices, the state can monitor social tensions, economic hardship, distress among young people, housing problems and bullying. The prefect's role is therefore not limited to implementing top-down decisions: it also helps the state understand what is happening in the provinces.

The prefectural office therefore acts as a neutral forum, able to bring together elected officials, public administrations, security forces, business representatives, associations and trade unions. According to Maria Cristina Caruso, this neutrality is a decisive strength. The prefect acts as an impartial third party: not standing for election, not representing any particular interest, and therefore able to seek common ground between opposing positions. This mediation comes into play in labour disputes, corporate crises, the continuity of essential public services and broader social tensions.

The prefect also plays a major role within Italy's system of local autonomy. The state, regions, provinces and municipalities each have powers recognised by the Constitution. But when local institutions suffer serious dysfunction, the state must be able to intervene. The prefect can then use mechanisms of coordination and mediation or, in some cases, substitution. This may occur when local authorities no longer provide certain services or when municipal councils need to be suspended or dissolved.

RESTORING THE RULE OF LAW, ENSURING SECURITY

Municipal councils may be dissolved because of serious breaches of the law, public-order problems, failure to approve a budget or, more seriously, mafia infiltration. In such cases, extraordinary commissions may be appointed to restore legality and temporarily manage the local authority. Maria Cristina Caruso knows this situation first-hand, as she currently performs this type of role in a municipality of 35,000 inhabitants in southern Italy. The prefect then becomes a key actor in institutional reconstruction.

In public security, the prefect's role is central but distinct from that of the Questore, who has technical and operational responsibility for the police forces at provincial level. The prefect is not the Questore's hierarchical superior; their relationship is functional. While the Questore organises police operations, the prefect carries institutional responsibility for maintaining the balance between security, individual freedoms and the collective interest. The same principle underpins security pacts between the state, regions and municipalities.

AT THE HEART OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AND CIVIL PROTECTION

Another crucial area is emergency management. Italy has a civil protection system renowned for its rapid response capacity and readiness to mobilise at any time. Within this system, the prefect is one of the first points of contact for local elected officials, public authorities and the public. The prefect activates emergency response mechanisms, coordinates available resources and ensures an institutional response to natural disasters, health crises or threats to national security.

Civil defence also includes preparedness for extreme scenarios, including nuclear, biological, chemical and radiological risks. The Covid-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of this function. Italian prefects had to strike a balance between protecting public health, maintaining economic activity, preserving public order and safeguarding fundamental freedoms.

They monitored the operation of businesses authorised to remain open during lockdown and could requisition buildings to house people in quarantine. For Maria Cristina Caruso, this period confirmed the institution's resilience.

IMMIGRATION, LIBERTIES AND DEMOCRATIC COHESION

Finally, the prefect is involved in civil rights, immigration and religious freedom. In a Mediterranean country directly affected by migration flows, prefectural offices administer procedures concerning non-EU workers, family reunification, the reception of asylum seekers and local integration policies. They also convene territorial councils for immigration, bringing together public administrations, local authorities, associations, trade unions and employers. The Ministry of the Interior also manages relations with religious communities.

> ***The prefect is a generalist representative of the state, a trusted coordinator and a guardian of democratic balance***

In conclusion, Maria Cristina Caruso presents the prefect as an 'institutional shock absorber', a 'sentinel of democracy' and a liaison officer between central government and the local level. These expressions capture a practical role: holding together a country made up of many territories, interests and crises. In contemporary Italy, the prefect is no longer simply a representative of state authority. The prefect is a generalist representative of the state, a trusted coordinator and a guardian of democratic balance.

The Brabant Standard: how a region turns resilience into public policy

Ina ADEMA

→ King's Commissioner
in the Province of North Brabant

Netherlands

In the Netherlands, resilience is not treated as a slogan. In North Brabant, it has become a practical method for public action. The "Brabant Standard", presented as a framework for resilient government, starts from a simple observation: modern public administration can no longer afford to be a passive observer when communities, businesses and citizens are exposed to criminal pressure, social tensions or major crises.

A PROSPEROUS REGION FACING ITS VULNERABILITIES

Ms Ina Adema , King's commissioner in the Province of North Brabant , first places Brabant within the Dutch political system. The Netherlands is organised across three levels of government: national, provincial and local. At national level, parliament and cabinet set the broad direction. At provincial level, the Provincial Council and Provincial Executive act as the regional democratic and administrative layer. At local level, municipal councils, mayors and aldermen are closest to citizens' daily concerns. The Brabant Standard positions the province not as a distant intermediary, but as a connector: close enough to understand local realities, large enough to coordinate action beyond municipal borders.

North Brabant itself is presented as a dynamic and attractive region. Its identity is made of many layers: high-tech industry, companies such as ASML and Philips, logistics, agriculture, cycling culture, carnival, food production, design, education and strong local traditions. It is a region associated with enterprise, innovation and social energy. But the same characteristics that make Brabant attractive also create vulnerabilities. A strategic location, good infrastructure, industrial estates, cross-border movement and a strong economy can be exploited by organised crime.

> ***But the same characteristics that make Brabant attractive also create vulnerabilities***

This is one of the central lessons : prosperity can produce blind spots. The exemples show the "downside of our attractive location" through images of drug waste, chemical barrels, police scenes, firearms, cash and pills. These are not abstract risks. They point to the realities of drug production, money laundering, intimidation, illegal dumping and criminal infiltration. In such cases, crime is not limited to the dramatic moment of arrest or prosecution. It seeps into ordinary life: a business owner approached by criminals, an industrial estate hiding suspicious activity, an employee intimidated into silence.

The message is clear. Public safety is not only a matter for the police. Of course, police and justice remain essential. They investigate, prosecute and enforce the law. But the Brabant Standard insists that public administration also has a decisive role to play. Authorities can detect warning signs, refuse permits, close unsafe premises, protect vulnerable businesses, support employees under pressure and prevent criminal actors from using legitimate systems as cover. In other words, government must be "more than just a bystander".

ANTICIPATING RISKS, MAINTAINING DIALOGUE AND PREPARING FOR CRISES

This requires a broader understanding of security. Traditional law enforcement often reacts after an offence has been committed. A resilient government thinks earlier. It asks where risks are developing, which sectors are vulnerable, which communities are under pressure and which administrative tools can be used before harm escalates. The framework therefore encourages a shift from reaction to anticipation. Resilience means being able not only to recover after a crisis, but to recognise weak signals, prepare responses and reduce dependency on emergency improvisation.

> *The time to build resilience is before the emergency, not while the smoke is already visible*

The examples given are deliberately concrete. A business owner may be pressured to rent out premises or accept suspicious activity. An industrial estate may become attractive because of anonymity, storage space and weak oversight. An employee may be threatened or manipulated because they occupy a useful position. These situations do not always begin with visible violence. They often begin with ambiguity, silence and fear. That is why resilience depends on trust. People must know whom to contact, believe that authorities will act, and feel that speaking up will not leave them isolated.

The Brabant Standard also gives importance to communication. One slide sums it up: "Being clear and keeping the dialogue open." This is not a decorative principle. In periods of tension, confusion can become dangerous. Demonstrations, agricultural protests, neighbourhood unrest, industrial incidents or public anger all require a state that can listen without disappearing and act without escalating unnecessarily. Clarity and dialogue are not opposites. A resilient authority must explain limits, make decisions, maintain contact and avoid letting frustration harden into confrontation.

The framework also extends beyond organised crime. It addresses resilience in the face of disasters and crises, from infrastructure failure and environmental incidents to fires, water-related risks or power disruption. Again, the lesson is practical: thinking ahead matters. Emergency plans, evacuation routes, trained teams, communication channels and cooperation between services cannot be improvised at the moment of crisis. The time to build resilience is before the emergency, not while the smoke is already visible.

A COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY BEYOND BRABANT

One of the strengths of the Brabant Standard is that it refuses a purely institutional view of resilience. The final image of hands placed together captures the broader spirit of the approach: "concluding together". Government cannot build resilience alone. Businesses, citizens, municipalities, emergency services, police, prosecutors and provincial authorities all hold part of the picture. The task is to connect those fragments before they become a crisis.

> *Government cannot build resilience alone*

The broader message is highly relevant beyond Brabant. Many regions across Europe face the same paradox: they are open, mobile, entrepreneurial and well-connected, and precisely for that reason exposed to new forms of risk. The answer cannot be to close down society or treat every citizen as a suspect. Nor can it be to rely only on police intervention after damage has been done. The challenge is to build governments that are alert, coordinated, legally robust and socially trusted.

The Brabant Standard offers a useful lesson in administrative realism. Resilience is not heroic. It is often made of permits, conversations, inspections, shared information, trained staff and timely decisions. It is the art of seeing what is happening beneath the surface before the surface cracks. In that sense, the framework is less a grand theory than a working discipline: think ahead, act together, stay clear, keep talking, and make public administration an active line of defence for democratic society.

TIRANA INTERNATIONAL
HOTEL & CONFERENCE CENTER

Photograph taken during the 31st European Days of the State Territorial Representatives, in Tirana (Albania), May 14-16th 2026.

European Association
of State Territorial Representatives

Fort de Charenton
94706 MAISONS-ALFORT CEDEX
FRANCE

contact@aerte-asso.org

www.aerte-asso.org